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Language and Literature

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### Knights: Chivalrous or Chauvinistic?

Interesting  
opening statement

The Middle Ages was a time of superstition, feudalism, supreme power of the church, and gallant knights. It was during this time that Geoffrey Chaucer began writing *The Canterbury Tales*, a frame story where twenty-four pilgrims tell tales while on a pilgrimage to Canterbury. While the pilgrims told these stories to entertain each other during the journey, Chaucer wrote these satirical stories to bring about change in the social life of the Dark Ages. One of Chaucer's humorous masterpieces in *The Canterbury Tales* was his character of the knight and the story the knight tells. Chaucer successfully uses satire in *The Knight's Tale* to show a true portrayal of knights in the Middle Ages; a portrayal that shows knights were not outstanding heroes but practitioners of silly chivalric codes who used these codes to dominate women. Thesis

When people think of a knight, they imagine in their heads a handsome and valiant warrior in flashy armor who fights evil monsters to save the damsel in distress. Sorry to shatter

descriptive  
language

topic  
sentence

the ideal image of the knight, but knights were not actually like that. Knights were soldiers hired by lords of estates to fight for them in exchange for food and shelter. Peasants did not become knights; usually boys in higher classes of society who were not the eldest son became knights.

They were sent away from home at an early age to another estate to train, and when they were done with their training they were knighted and became "Sir Whatever-His-Name-Is". After a man became a knight, he fought in wars and lived his life by a complicated system of stringent

Transition

vocabulary  
word

social codes to make himself appear to be a gentleman. These codes included him to make an oath of loyalty to his lord, to observe fair rules of warfare, and to practice courtly love (Leeming <sup>book same</sup> 121-122). By the way textbooks describe knights they make them seem like they were perfect gentlemen, and that was the idea that Chaucer was contradicting in *The Knight's Tale*. Chaucer's version of a knight seems to be typical: polite, heroic, gentle. But he has some obvious flaws that <sup>transition</sup> make the reader realize he is definitely not a knight in shining armor. In fact, Chaucer's knight does not even wear shiny armor! He wears a tunic made of a coarse cloth and his chain mail is <sup>evidence</sup> jaded from all the expeditions he has been on (Chaucer 144). The knight is a gentle man, but <sup>book same</sup> perhaps he is too gentle. At the end of *The Pardoner's Tale*, the pardoner tries to sell fake relics and the host becomes upset. The knight has to intercede and he tells them to kiss and make up <sup>vocabulary word</sup> (Chaucer 175). The ironic thing about this moment is the knight is a trained soldier who kills people for a living; he has fought in several conflicts, including the Crusades. And yet here he is <sup>evidence</sup> trying to avert from conflict and discontent (123HelpMe). This is not very standard behavior for a knight. When it is the knight's turn to tell his tale, he attempts to be a courteous person by telling the other pilgrims that he will not go into small details in his story because his story is <sup>book same</sup> long enough and he does not want to hinder anyone in this company (Chaucer 20). Chaucer uses <sup>evidence</sup> situational irony and has the knight say he will not embellish his story with nominal details, but <sup>vocabulary word</sup> then the knight will go into long rants about inconsequential matters that do not enhance the story. In his tale, he describes the stadium Theseus had built for the tournament and continues to ramble on about the temples that were built to honor the gods. He goes into every little feature of these temples, from what the statue of each god looks like to what paintings are on the walls. The <sup>vocabulary word</sup> knight's drivel in his tale makes his story choppy and longer than it needs to be. So is the knight

Travelers?

sincerely courteous to his fellow passengers? Or is he pretending to have good manners?

Topic sentence

*The Knight's Tale* tells the story of Arcite and Palamon, two archetypal knights who

follow the codes of chivalry. What makes Arcite and Palamon the epitome of the classical knight

vocabulary word

is the fact that they both observe courtly love when they fight each other to win the affection of a

lady named Emily. Both Arcite and Palamon fall in love with Emily and go to great lengths to

evidence

win her love; they fight in a duel, court her from a far, and even go as far as honorably fighting

for her in a tournament. These two knights sound perfect, but the problem is that they are too

topic sentence

perfect. On page 57 of *The Knight's Tale* Chaucer demonstrates how Arcite is a notable knight.

After the tournament Arcite dies and Chaucer makes an allusion to Hector's death to show that

Arcite was as great as a warrior as Hector. Because Arcite is just as good as Hector he deserves a

transition

funeral worthy of him. Some say that because Arcite and Palamon are too good to be true that

online source

they are parodies of knights (123HelpMe). Chaucer uses *The Knight's Tale* to show that the

chivalric values that knights follow are ridiculous. In the story, before the tournament begins,

Arcite, Palamon, and Emily each go to a different god and asks them to help them get the ending

they want. All three of them make an oath of loyalty to the god they pray to that if the god helps

them they will be a faithful servant to them. In response each god promises to help them.

However, by the end of the story everyone is not exactly happy because they all did not get the

evidence

end of the bargain that they were expecting: Arcite dies and does not get Emily, Palamon is upset

because Arcite died, and Emily is forced to marry a guy even though she did not want to. So what

is the point in acting like a chivalrous person when nothing good comes out of it? Why do

knight follow these codes of chivalry when they do not bring any happiness into their lives? For

transition

example, a knight can only observe ladies from far away; they can court them but they can not be

with them. Well, if a knight likes a girl and she is available then why can he not be with her?

What good does it do to follow rules when they keep a person away from the one they love?

*Topic sentence* Knights not only followed these impractical rules, but they also used these rules to control women. Back in the Middle Ages women had no freedom like they do today. Basically women in

the Middle Ages were only expected to have kids and run the household. Lower class women

were at a bigger disadvantage because in addition to having kids and running a family they were

*back same* also expected to do fieldwork (Barber 3). An English professor named David Adams Leeming

stated that women in the Middle Ages had no political rights and were considered subordinate to

men, although in some rare cases women in higher classes were allowed to manage their

husband's business if their husband went away on a trip. In *The Knight's Tale*, Emily prays to the

goddess Diana, who is the goddess of the hunt and of chastity. Emily asks her to allow her to be a

maiden all her because she does not want to get married. But then along comes Arcite and

Palamon who start fighting over her and Theseus decides to hold a tournament to see which one

of them will get Emily. Does Emily get a voice in this matter? Did she not ask Diana to be a

maiden for the rest of her life? The answers to these questions are no, and yes. Emily does not

want to get married, but because she is a woman and is considered to be inferior to men she must

do as Theseus says, and according to Theseus she will marry whoever wins the tournament.

*They say conversation* According to Stephenie Maddern, a high school student, Emily symbolizes how women had no

*peer quote* say in who they would get to be with in the Middle Ages. This was a typical arrangement in the

Middle Ages. Unlike today, people back then did not marry for love. Instead, they saw marriage *transition*

as a business deal; a way for a bankrupt man to marry a woman with money so he can take her

money. Or perhaps marriage was a way for a woman with money but no title to marry a man

with a title so her family can have her husband's title. Then again, Emily is not the only female ignored in *The Knight's Tale*. Theseus had conquered a group called the Amazons, who were ruled by Queen Hippolyta. Because she was queen, Hippolyta had control over her people. But <sup>evidence</sup> she married Theseus and he took away all the power she had as queen. It was as if he was a <sup>metaphor</sup> vacuum cleaner and he just cleaned away everything Hippolyta had done, which is unfair to her. <sup>Nice work</sup>

<sup>Vocabulary words</sup> Were knights really the wonderful men that people were taught them to be? No, they were not. They were soldiers who simulated the appearance of being a good guy. They used this mask to take charge of women and be the superior being in society. Chaucer wanted to show the truth about knights in his tale, and he accomplished in showing people a knight's true colors: gray, like the color his armor is said to be. The color gray symbolizes cloudiness or confusion. This is the best color to symbolize a knight because they lie to people to make them believe they are <sup>Vocabulary words</sup> equitable and salutary human beings.

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